Benedict of Nursia

(2 March 480 – 21 March 547)

BRIEFING

Benedict of Nursia (Latin: ; Italian: ; 2 March 480 – 21 March 547), often known as **Saint Benedict**, was a Christian monk. He is famed in the Catholic Church, the Eastern Orthodox Church, the Lutheran Churches, the Anglican Communion, and Old Catholic Churches. In 1964, Pope Paul VI declared Benedict a patron saint of Europe.

Benedict founded twelve communities for monks at Subiaco in present-day Lazio, Italy (about 65 kilometres (40 mi) to the east of Rome), before moving southeast to Monte Cassino in the mountains of central Italy. The present-day Order of Saint Benedict emerged later and, moreover, is not an "order" as the term is commonly understood, but a confederation of autonomous congregations.

Benedict's main achievement, his , contains a set of rules for his monks to follow. Heavily influenced by the writings of John Cassian (c. 360 – c. 435), it shows strong affinity with the earlier , but it also has a unique spirit of balance, moderation and reasonableness (ἐπιείκεια,), which persuaded most Christian religious communities founded throughout the Middle Ages to adopt it. As a result, Benedict's Rule became one of the most influential religious rules in Western Christendom. For this reason, Giuseppe Carletti regarded Benedict as the founder of Western Christian monasticism.

HAGIOGRAPHY

Apart from a short poem attributed to Mark of Monte Cassino, the only ancient account of Benedict is found in the second volume of Pope Gregory I's four-book , thought to have been written in 593, although the authenticity of this work is disputed.

Gregory's account of Benedict's life, however, is not a biography in the modern sense of the word. It provides instead a spiritual portrait of the gentle, disciplined abbot. In a letter to Bishop Maximilian of Syracuse, Gregory states his intention for his , saying they are a kind of (an , literally, 'flower garden') of the most striking miracles of Italian holy men.

Gregory did not set out to write a chronological, historically anchored story of Benedict, but he did base his anecdotes on direct testimony. To establish his authority, Gregory explains that his information came from what he considered the best sources: a handful of Benedict's disciples who lived with him and witnessed his various miracles. These followers, he says, are Constantinus, who succeeded Benedict as Abbot of Monte Cassino, Honoratus, who was abbot of Subiaco when St. Gregory wrote his , Valentinianus, and Simplicius.

In Gregory's day, history was not recognised as an independent field of study; it was a branch of grammar or rhetoric, and was an account that summed up the findings of the learned when they wrote what was, at that time, considered history. Gregory's , Book Two, then, an authentic medieval hagiography cast as a conversation between the Pope and his deacon Peter, is designed to teach spiritual lessons.

EARLY LIFE

Benedict was the son of a Roman noble of Nursia, the modern Norcia, in Umbria. According to Gregory's narrative, Benedict was born around 480, and the year in which he abandoned his studies and left home "was probably a few years before 500."

Benedict was sent to Rome to study, but was disappointed by the academic studies he encountered there. Seeking to flee the great city, he left with his nurse and settled in Enfide. Enfide, which the tradition of Subiaco identifies with the modern Affile, is in the Simbruini mountains, about forty miles from Rome and two miles from Subiaco.

A short distance from Enfide is the entrance to a narrow, gloomy valley, penetrating the mountains and leading directly to Subiaco. The path continues to ascend, and the side of the ravine on which it runs becomes steeper until a cave is reached, above this point the mountain now rises almost perpendicularly; while on the right, it strikes in a rapid descent down to where, in Benedict's day, 500 feet (150 m) below, lay the blue waters of a lake. The cave has a large triangular-shaped opening and is about ten feet deep. On his way from Enfide, Benedict met a monk, Romanus of Subiaco, whose monastery was on the mountain above the cliff overhanging the cave. Romanus discussed with Benedict the purpose which had brought him to Subiaco, and gave him the monk's habit. By his advice Benedict became a hermit and for three years lived in this cave above the lake.

LATER LIFE

Gregory tells little of Benedict's later life. He now speaks of Benedict no longer as a youth ( ), but as a man ( ) of God. Romanus, Gregory states, served Benedict in every way he could. The monk apparently visited him frequently, and on fixed days brought him food.

During these three years of solitude, broken only by occasional communications with the outer world and by the visits of Romanus, Benedict matured both in mind and character, in knowledge of himself and of his fellow-man, and at the same time he became not merely known to, but secured the respect of, those about him; so much so that on the death of the abbot of a monastery in the neighbourhood (identified by some with Vicovaro), the community came to him and begged him to become its abbot. Benedict was acquainted with the life and discipline of the monastery, and knew that "their manners were diverse from his and therefore that they would never agree together: yet, at length, overcome with their entreaty, he gave his consent". The experiment failed; the monks tried to poison him. The legend goes that they first tried to poison his drink. He prayed a blessing over the cup and the cup shattered. Thus he left the group and went back to his cave at Subiaco.

There lived in the neighborhood a priest called Florentius who, moved by envy, tried to ruin him. He tried to poison him with poisoned bread. When he prayed a blessing over the bread, a raven swept in and took the loaf away. From this time his miracles seem to have become frequent, and many people, attracted by his sanctity and character, came to Subiaco to be under his guidance. Having failed by sending him poisonous bread, Florentius tried to seduce his monks with some prostitutes. To avoid further temptations, in about 530 Benedict left Subiaco. He founded 12 monasteries in the vicinity of Subiaco, and, eventually, in 530 he founded the great Benedictine monastery of Monte Cassino, which lies on a hilltop between Rome and Naples.

VENERATION

Benedict died of a fever at Monte Cassino not long after his sister, Scholastica, and was buried in the same tomb. According to tradition, this occurred on 21 March 547. He was named patron protector of Europe by Pope Paul VI in 1964. In 1980, Pope John Paul II declared him co-patron of Europe, together with Cyril and Methodius. Furthermore, he is the patron saint of speleologists. On the island of Tenerife (Spain) he is the patron saint of fields and farmers. An important romeria ( ) is held on this island in his honor, one of the most important in the country.

In the pre-1970 General Roman Calendar, his feast is kept on 21 March, the day of his death according to some manuscripts of the and that of Bede. Because on that date his liturgical memorial would always be impeded by the observance of Lent, the 1969 revision of the General Roman Calendar moved his memorial to 11 July, the date that appears in some Gallic liturgical books of the end of the 8th century as the feast commemorating his birth ( ). There is some uncertainty about the origin of this feast. Accordingly, on 21 March the Roman Martyrology mentions in a line and a half that it is Benedict's day of death and that his memorial is celebrated on 11 July, while on 11 July it devotes seven lines to speaking of him, and mentions the tradition that he died on 21 March.

The Eastern Orthodox Church commemorates Saint Benedict on 14 March.

The Lutheran Churches celebrate the Feast of Saint Benedict on July 11.

The Anglican Communion has no single universal calendar, but a provincial calendar of saints is published in each province. In almost all of these, Saint Benedict is commemorated on 11 July. Benedict is remembered in the Church of England with a Lesser Festival on 11 July.

Benedict's Rule

Benedict wrote the for monks living communally under the authority of an abbot. The comprises seventy-three short chapters. Its wisdom is twofold: spiritual (how to live a Christocentric life on earth) and administrative (how to run a monastery efficiently). More than half of the chapters describe how to be obedient and humble, and what to do when a member of the community is not. About one-fourth regulate the work of God (the "opus Dei"). One-tenth outline how, and by whom, the monastery should be managed. Benedictine asceticism is known for its moderation.

RULE OF SAINT BENEDICT

The ***Rule of Saint Benedict*** (Latin:) is a book of precepts written in Latin c. 530 by St. Benedict of Nursia (c. AD 480–550) for monks living communally under the authority of an abbot.

The spirit of Saint Benedict's Rule is summed up in the motto of the Benedictine Confederation: ("peace") and the traditional ("pray and work"). Compared to other precepts, the Rule provides a moderate path between individual zeal and formulaic institutionalism; because of this middle ground, it has been widely popular. Benedict's concerns were his views of the needs of monks in a community environment: namely, to establish due order, to foster an understanding of the relational nature of human beings, and to provide a spiritual father to support and strengthen the individual's ascetic effort and the spiritual growth that is required for the fulfillment of the human vocation, theosis.

The has been used by Benedictines for 15 centuries, and thus St. Benedict is sometimes regarded as the founder of Western monasticism due to the reforming influence that his rules had on the contemporary Catholic hierarchy. There is, however, no evidence to suggest that Benedict intended to found a religious order in the modern sense, and it was not until the Late Middle Ages that mention was made of an "Order of Saint Benedict". His was written as a guide for individual, autonomous communities: all Benedictine Houses (and the Congregations in which they have grouped themselves) still remain self-governing. Advantages seen in retaining this unique

Benedictine emphasis on autonomy include cultivating models of tightly bonded communities and contemplative lifestyles. Perceived disadvantages comprise geographical isolation from important activities in adjacent communities. Other perceived losses include inefficiency and lack of mobility in the service of others, and insufficient appeal to potential members. These different emphases emerged within the framework of the Rule in the course of history and are to some extent present within the Benedictine Confederation and the Cistercian Orders of the Common and the Strict Observance.

Origins

Christian monasticism first appeared in the Egyptian desert, before Benedict of Nursia. Under the inspiration of Saint Anthony the Great (251–356), ascetic monks led by Saint Pachomius (286–346) formed the first Christian monastic communities under what became known as an , from the Aramaic (father).

Within a generation, both solitary as well as communal monasticism became very popular and spread outside of Egypt, first to Palestine and the Judean Desert and thence to Syria and North Africa. Saint Basil of Caesarea codified the precepts for these eastern monasteries in his Ascetic Rule, or , which is still used today in the Eastern Orthodox Church.

In the West in about the year 500, Benedict became so upset by the immorality of society in Rome that he gave up his studies there, at age fourteen, and chose the life of an ascetic monk in the pursuit of personal holiness, living as a hermit in a cave near the rugged region of Subiaco. In time, setting an example with his zeal, he began to attract disciples. After considerable initial struggles with his first community at Subiaco, he eventually founded the monastery of Monte Cassino in 529, where he wrote his Rule near the end of his life.

In chapter 73, Saint Benedict commends the Rule of Saint Basil and alludes to further authorities. He was probably aware of the Rule written by Pachomius (or attributed to him), and his Rule also shows influence by the Rule of St Augustine of Hippo and the writings of Saint John Cassian. Benedict's greatest debt, however, may be to the anonymous document known as the Rule of the Master, which Benedict seems to have radically excised, expanded, revised and corrected in the light of his own considerable experience and insight. Saint Benedict's work expounded upon preconceived ideas that were present in the religious community only making minor changes more in line with the time period relevant to his system.

Overview

The was translated into Armenian by Nerses of Lampron in the 10th century and is used by the Armenian Catholic Mekhitarists today. It was also translated into Old English by Æthelwold.

The opens with a hortatory preface, drawing on the , in which Saint Benedict sets forth the main principles of the religious life, : the renunciation of one's own will and arming oneself "with the strong and noble weapons of obedience" under the banner of "the true King, Christ the Lord" (Prol. 3). He proposes to establish a "school for the Lord's service" (Prol. 45) in which the "way to salvation" (Prol. 48) shall be taught, so that by persevering in the monastery till death his disciples may "through patience share in the passion of Christ that [they] may deserve also to share in his Kingdom" (Prol. 50, ; note: Latin and have the same root, Fry, RB 1980, p.167).

Chapter 1 defines four kinds of monk:

Chapter 2 describes the necessary qualifications of an abbot, forbids the abbot to make distinctions between persons in the monastery except for particular merit, and warns him that he will be answerable for the salvation of the souls in his care.

Chapter 3 ordains the calling of the brothers to council upon all affairs of importance to the community.

Chapter 4 lists several "tools for good work", "tools of the spiritual craft" for the "workshop" that is "the enclosure of the monastery and the stability in the community". These are essentially the duties of every Christian and are mainly Scriptural either in letter or in spirit. There are around 72–74 "tools", depending on how phrases are split up and counted in various translations, as the original was not numbered.

Chapter 5 prescribes prompt, ungrudging, and absolute obedience to the superior in all things lawful, "unhesitating obedience" being called the first step (Latin) of humility.

Chapter 6 recommends taciturnity (Latin), i.e. the state or quality of being reserved or reticent in conversation, in the use of speech.

Chapter 7 divides humility into twelve steps forming rungs in a ladder that leads to heaven: (1) Fear God; (2) Subordinate one's will to the will of God; (3) Be obedient to one's superior; (4) Be patient amid hardships; (5) Confess one's sins; (6) Accept the meanest of tasks, and hold oneself as a "worthless workman"; (7) Consider oneself "inferior to all"; (8) Follow examples set by superiors; (9) Do not speak until spoken to; (10) Do not readily laugh; (11) Speak simply and modestly; and (12) Express one's inward humility through bodily posture.

Chapter 8–19 regulate the Divine Office, the Godly work to which "nothing is to be preferred", namely the eight canonical hours. Detailed arrangements are made for the number of Psalms, etc., to be recited in winter and summer, on Sundays, weekdays, Holy Days, and at other times.

Chapter 19 emphasizes the reverence owed to the omnipresent God.

Chapter 20 directs that prayer be made with heartfelt compunction rather than many words. It should be prolonged only under the inspiration of divine grace, and in community always kept short and terminated at a sign from the superior.

Chapter 21 regulates the appointment of a Dean over every ten monks.

Chapter 22 regulates the dormitory. Each monk is to have a separate bed and is to sleep in his habit, so as to be ready to rise without delay for the Divine Office at night; a candle (Latin "candela") shall burn in the dormitory throughout the night.

Chapters 23–29 specify a graduated scale of punishments for contumacy (refusal to obey authority), disobedience, pride, and other grave faults: first, private admonition; next, public reproof; then separation from the brothers at meals and elsewhere; and finally excommunication (or in the case of those lacking understanding of what this means, corporal punishment instead).

Chapter 30 directs that a wayward brother who has left the monastery must be received again, if he promises to make amends; but if he leaves again, and again, after his third departure all return is finally barred.

Chapters 31 & 32 order the appointment of officials to take charge of the goods of the monastery.

Chapter 33 forbids the private possession of anything without the leave of the abbot, who is, however, bound to supply all necessities.

Chapter 34 prescribes a just distribution of such things.

Chapter 35 arranges for the service in the kitchen by all monks in turn.

Chapters 36 & 37 address care of the sick, the old, and the young. They are to have certain dispensations from the strict Rule, chiefly in the matter of food.

Chapter 38 prescribes reading aloud during meals, which duty is to be performed by those who can do so with edification to the rest. Signs are to be used for whatever may be wanted at meals, so that no voice interrupts the reading. The reader eats with the servers after the rest have finished, but he is allowed a little food beforehand in order to lessen the fatigue of reading.

Chapters 39 & 40 regulate the quantity and quality of the food. Two meals a day are allowed, with two cooked dishes at each. Each monk is allowed a pound of bread and a hemina (about a quarter litre) of wine. The flesh of four-footed animals is prohibited except for the sick and the weak.

Chapter 41 prescribes the hours of the meals, which vary with the time of year.

Chapter 42 enjoins the reading of an edifying book in the evening, and orders strict silence after Compline.

Chapters 43–46 define penalties for minor faults, such as coming late to prayer or meals.

Chapter 47 requires the abbot to call the brothers to the "work of God" ( ) in choir, and to appoint chanters and readers.

Chapter 48 emphasizes the importance of daily manual labour appropriate to the ability of the monk. The duration of labour varies with the season but is never less than five hours a day.

Chapter 49 recommends some voluntary self-denial for Lent, with the abbot's sanction.

Chapters 50 & 51 contain rules for monks working in the fields or travelling. They are directed to join in spirit, as far as possible, with their brothers in the monastery at the regular hours of prayers.

Chapter 52 commands that the oratory be used for purposes of devotion only.

Chapter 53 deals with hospitality. Guests are to be met with due courtesy by the abbot or his deputy; during their stay they are to be under the special protection of an appointed monk; they are not to associate with the rest of the community except by special permission.

Chapter 54 forbids the monks to receive letters or gifts without the abbot's leave.

Chapter 55 says clothing is to be adequate and suited to the climate and locality, at the discretion of the abbot. It must be as plain and cheap as is consistent with due economy. Each monk is to have a change of clothes to allow for washing, and when travelling is to have clothes of better quality. Old clothes are to be given to the poor.

Chapter 56 directs the abbot to eat with the guests.

Chapter 57 enjoins humility on the craftsmen of the monastery, and if their work is for sale, it shall be rather below than above the current trade price.

Chapter 58 lays down rules for the admission of new members, which is not to be made too easy. The postulant first spends a short time as a guest; then he is admitted to the novitiate where his vocation is severely tested; during this time he is always free to leave. If after twelve months' probation he perseveres, he may promise before the whole community – "stability, conversion of manners, and obedience". With this vow he binds himself for life to the monastery of his profession.

Chapter 59 describes the ceremony of indenturing young boys into the monastery and arranges certain financial arrangements for this.

Chapter 60 regulates the position of priests who join the community. They are to set an example of humility, and can only exercise their priestly functions by permission of the abbot.

Chapter 61 provides for the reception of foreign monks as guests, and for their admission to the community.

Chapter 62 deals with the ordination of priests from within the monastic community.

Chapter 63 lays down that precedence in the community shall be determined by the date of admission, merit of life, or the appointment of the abbot.

Chapter 64 orders that the abbot be elected by his monks, and that he be chosen for his charity, zeal, and discretion.

Chapter 65 allows the appointment of a prior or deputy superior, but warns that he is to be entirely subject to the abbot and may be admonished, deposed, or expelled for misconduct.

Chapter 66 appoints a porter, and recommends that each monastery be self-contained and avoid intercourse with the outer world.

Chapter 67 instructs monks how to behave on a journey.

Chapter 68 orders that all cheerfully try to do whatever is commanded, however apparently impossible it may seem.

Chapter 69 forbids the monks from defending one another.

Chapter 70 prohibits them from beating (Latin) or excommunicating one another.

Chapter 71 encourages the brothers to be obedient not only to the abbot and his officials, but also to one another.

Chapter 72 briefly exhorts the monks to zeal and fraternal charity.

Chapter 73 is an epilogue; it declares that the Rule is not offered as an ideal of perfection, but merely as a means towards godliness, intended chiefly for beginners in the spiritual life.

Outline of the Benedictine Line

Saint Benedict's model for the monastic life was the family, with the abbot as father and all the monks as brothers. Priesthood was not initially an important part of Benedictine monasticism – monks used the services of their local priest. Because of this, almost all the Rule is applicable to communities of women under the authority of an abbess. This appeal to multiple groups would later make the Rule of Saint Benedict an integral set of guidelines for the development of the Christian faith.

Saint Benedict's Rule organises the monastic day into regular periods of communal and private prayer, sleep, spiritual reading, and manual labour – , "that in all [things] God may be glorified" (Rule ch. 57.9). In later centuries, intellectual work and teaching took the place of farming, crafts, or other forms of manual labour for many – if not most – Benedictines.

Traditionally, the daily life of the Benedictine revolved around the eight canonical hours. The monastic timetable, or Horarium, would begin at midnight with the service, or "office", of (today also called the Office of Readings), followed by the morning office of at 3 am. Before the advent of wax candles in the 14th century, this office was said in the dark or with minimal lighting; and monks were expected to memorise everything. These services could be very long, sometimes lasting till dawn, but usually consisted of a chant, three antiphons, three psalms, and three lessons, along with celebrations of any local saints' days. Afterwards the monks would retire for a few hours of sleep and then rise at 6am to wash and attend the office of . They then gathered in to receive instructions for the day and to attend to any judicial business. Then came private Mass or spiritual reading or work until 9am when the office of was said, and then High Mass. At noon came the office of and the midday meal. After a brief period of communal recreation, the monk could retire to rest until the office of at 3pm. This was followed by farming and housekeeping work until after twilight, the evening prayer of at 6pm, then the night prayer of at 9pm, and retiring to bed, before beginning the cycle again. In modern times, this timetable is often changed to accommodate any apostolate outside the monastic enclosure (e.g. the running of a school or parish).

Many Benedictine Houses have a number of who are affiliated with them in prayer, having made a formal private promise (usually renewed annually) to follow the Rule of St Benedict in their private life as closely as their individual circumstances and prior commitments permit.

In recent years discussions have occasionally been held concerning the applicability of the principles and spirit of the Rule of Saint Benedict to the secular working environment.

Reforms

During the more than 1500 years of their existence, Benedictines have seen cycles of flourish and decline. Several reform movements sought more intense devotion to both the letter and spirit of the Rule of St Benedict, at least as they understood it. Examples include the Camaldolese, the Cistercians, the Trappists (a reform of the Cistercians), and the Sylvestrines.

Secular significance

Charlemagne had Benedict's Rule copied and distributed to encourage monks throughout western Europe to follow it as a standard. Beyond its religious influences, the Rule of St Benedict was one of the most important written works to shape medieval Europe, embodying the ideas of a written constitution and the rule of law. It also incorporated a degree of democracy in a non-democratic society, and dignified manual labor.

Popular motto *Ora et labora*

Although not stated explicitly in the rule, the motto is widely considered to be a shortform capturing the spirit of the rule.

Saint Benedict Medal

This devotional medal originally came from a cross in honor of Saint Benedict. On one side, the medal has an image of Saint Benedict, holding the Holy Rule in his left hand and a cross in his right. There is a raven on one side of him, with a cup on the other side of him. Around the medal's outer margin are the words ("May we be strengthened by his presence in the hour of our death"). The other side of the medal has a cross with the initials CSSML on the vertical bar which signify ("May the Holy Cross be my light") and on the horizontal bar are the initials NDSMD which stand for ("Let not the dragon be my guide"). The initials CSPB stand for ("The Cross of the Holy Father Benedict") and are located on the interior angles of the cross. Either the inscription (Peace) or the Christogram may be found at the top of the cross in most cases. Around the medal's margin on this side are the initials VRSNSMV which stand for ("Begone Satan, do not suggest to me thy vanities") then a space followed by the initials SMQLIVB which signify ("Evil are the things thou profferest, drink thou thine own poison").

This medal was first struck in 1880 to commemorate the fourteenth centenary of Benedict's birth and is also called the Jubilee Medal; its exact origin, however, is unknown. In 1647, during a witchcraft trial at Natternberg near Metten Abbey in Bavaria, the accused women testified they had no power over Metten, which was under the protection of the cross. An investigation found a number of painted crosses on the walls of the abbey with the letters now found on St Benedict medals, but their meaning had been forgotten. A manuscript written in 1415 was eventually found that had a picture of Benedict holding a scroll in one hand and a staff which ended in a cross in the other. On the scroll and staff were written the full words of the initials contained on the crosses. Medals then began to be struck in Germany, which then spread throughout Europe. This medal was first approved by Pope Benedict XIV in his briefs of 23 December 1741 and 12 March 1742.

Benedict has been also the motif of many collector's coins around the world. The Austria 50 euro 'The Christian Religious Orders', issued on 13 March 2002 is one of them.

SAINT BENEDICT MEDAL

The **Saint Benedict Medal** is a Christian sacramental medal containing symbols and text related to the life of Saint Benedict of Nursia, used by Roman Catholics, Old Catholics, Lutherans, Western Orthodox, Anglicans and Methodists, in the Benedictine Christian tradition, especially votarists and oblates.

This religious object is also a Christian symbol of opening doors and opening difficult paths. Tradition holds that it protects from curses, evil and vice, protects against diseases and protects good health. There are similar exorcism medals and sacramentals in Christian tradition, including from the mendicant Franciscan tradition, an "inheritor" of some Benedictine traditions, called the Cross or Brief of Saint Anthony.

The reverse side of the medal carries the ('Begone, Satan!') Sometimes carried as part of a rosary or embedded in a scapular, it is also worn separately.

History

The exact time and date of the making of the first Saint Benedict Medal are not clear. The medal was originally a cross, dedicated to the devotion in honour of St. Benedict. At some point medals were struck that bore the image of St. Benedict holding a cross aloft in his right hand and his Rule for Monasteries in the other hand. Then a sequence of capital letters was placed around the large figure of the cross moline on the reverse side of the medal. The meaning of what the letters signified was lost over time until around 1647 an old manuscript was discovered at the Benedictine St. Michael's Abbey in Metten. In the manuscript, written in 1415, was a picture depicting St. Benedict holding in one hand a staff which ends in a cross, and a scroll in the other.

On the staff and scroll were written in full the words of which the mysterious letters were the initials, a Latin prayer of exorcism against Satan. The manuscript contains the exorcism formula ('Step back, Satan'), and the letters were found to correspond to this phrase.

The exorcism prayer is found in an early thirteenth century legend of the Devil's Bridge at Sens, wherein an architect sold his soul to the devil and then subsequently repented. M. le Curé of Sens, wearing his stole, exorcised the devil, driving him away with holy water and the words, which he made the penitent repeat.

Medals bearing the image of St. Benedict, a cross moline, and these letters began to be struck in Germany, and soon spread over Europe. Vincent de Paul (†1660) seems to have known of it, for his Daughters of Charity have always worn it attached to their beads, and for many years it was only made, at least in France, for them. The medals were first approved by Benedict XIV on 23 December, 1741, and again on 12 March, 1742. The medal in its traditional design was in use for many decades and is still in use today.

In Gabriel Bucelin's 1679 , he recounts several incidents in which St. Benedict's Medal was viewed as efficacious in addressing illness or some local calamity. In the 1743 , Abbot Löbl, of St. Margaret's Monastery of Prague, recommended recourse to the medal as a remedy against bleeding. Prosper Guéranger relates several incidents of religious conversions which he attributes to the intercession of St. Benedict through the pious use of the medal.

The Jubilee medal was struck in 1880, in remembrance of the 1400th anniversary of St. Benedict's birth. The initials of the formula have been found on Saint Benedict Medals at least since 1780.[9] The Jubilee medal continues to be the most popular design.

The medal's symbolism

On the front is a cross, containing the letters C S S M L - N D S M D, initials of the words ('May the holy cross be my light! May the dragon never be my overlord!').[4] The large C S P B stand for ('The Cross of [our] Holy Father Benedict'). Surrounding the back of the medal are the letters V R S N S M V - S M Q L I V B, in reference to ('Begone Satan! Never tempt me with your vanities! What you offer me is evil. Drink the poison yourself!') and finally, located at the top is the word which means 'peace'.

Latin Abbreviation	Latin Text	English Text	Location
PAX		Peace	Top
C S P B		The Cross of [our] Holy Father Benedict	Four quadrants made by centre cross
C S S M L		May the holy cross be my light!	Center cross, vertical bar
N D S M D		"May the dragon never be my overlord!" "Let the devil not be my leader."	Center cross, horizontal bar
V R S		"Begone satan!" "Step back satan"	Clockwise around disk
N S M V		"Never tempt me with your vanities!" "Don't persuade me of wicked things."	Clockwise around disk
S M Q L		"What you offer me is evil." "What you are showing me is bad."	Clockwise around disk
I V B		"Drink the poison yourself!" "Drink your poisons yourself."	Clockwise around disk

On the back of the medal is Saint Benedict holding a cross in his right hand, the Christian symbol of salvation, and in the left his Rule for Monasteries. To Benedict's right, below the cross, is a poisoned cup, a reference to the legend that hostile monks attempted to poison him, and the cup containing poisoned wine shattered when the saint made the sign of the cross over it. To his left, below the rule, the raven that carried off a loaf of poisoned bread. From this is derived the tradition that the medal protects against poisoning.

Above the cup and raven are the words ('The Cross of [our] Holy Father Benedict'). Surrounding the figure of Saint Benedict are the words ('May we be strengthened by his presence in the hour of our death'), since Benedictines regarded him as a particular patron of a happy death. Below the icon of St. Benedict, it is written 'EX SM Casino, MDCCCLXXX' and it means 'Found out from the holy Casino mountain in 1880.'

Use of the medal

The medal represents a prayer on the part of the user to invoke God's blessing and protection through the intercession of St. Benedict. There are no special rules prescribed for its use. It may be worn on a chain around the neck, carried on one's person, placed in one's vehicle, home, or in one's place of business. It is sometimes incorporated into a crucifix to create a "St. Benedict's Cross", usually with the obverse side as the halo for the .

Lay Oblates of St. Benedict are permitted to wear the Medal of St. Benedict instead of the small black cloth scapular.

The Blessing of St. Maur is customarily bestowed on the sick using a relic of the True Cross, in hopes of assisting speedy recovery of their health. Since it is often impossible to have a relic of the True Cross, the Sacred Congregation of Rites in 1959 granted permission for St. Benedict Medals to be used instead of the relic of the True Cross to confer the Blessing.

As with a number of other religious articles, "The faithful, who devoutly use an article of devotion (crucifix or cross, rosary, scapular or medal) properly blessed by any priest, obtain a partial indulgence."

Blessing of the medal

Medals of Saint Benedict are sacramentals that may be blessed legitimately by any priest or deacon, not necessarily a Benedictine.

The following English form may be used:

V: Our help is in the name of the Lord.

R: Who made heaven and earth.

V: In the name of God the Father + almighty, who made heaven and earth, the seas and all that is in them, I exorcise these medals against the power and attacks of the evil one. May all who use these medals devoutly be blessed with health of soul and body. In the name of the Father + almighty, of the Son + Jesus Christ our Lord, and of the Holy + Spirit the Paraclete, and in the love of the same Lord Jesus Christ who will come on the last day to judge the living and the dead, and the world by fire.

R: Amen.

V: Let us pray. Almighty God, the boundless source of all good things, we humbly ask that, through the intercession of Saint Benedict, you pour out your blessings + upon these medals. May those who use them devoutly and earnestly strive to perform good works be blessed by you with the health of soul and body, the grace of a holy life, and remission of the temporal punishment due to sin.

May they also with the help of your merciful love, resist the temptation of the evil one and strive to exercise true charity and justice toward all, so that one day they may appear sinless and holy in your sight. This we ask through Christ our Lord.

R: Amen.

The medal is then sprinkled with holy water.

INFLUENCE

The early Middle Ages have been called "the Benedictine centuries". In April 2008, Pope Benedict XVI discussed the influence St Benedict had on Western Europe. The pope said that "with his life and work St Benedict exercised a fundamental influence on the development of European civilization and culture" and helped Europe to emerge from the "dark night of history" that followed the fall of the Roman Empire.

Benedict contributed more than anyone else to the rise of monasticism in the West. His Rule was the foundational document for thousands of religious communities in the Middle Ages. To this day, The Rule of St. Benedict is the most common and influential Rule used by monasteries and monks, more than 1,400 years after its writing.

A basilica was built upon the birthplace of Benedict and Scholastica in the 1400s. Ruins of their familial home were excavated from beneath the church and preserved. The earthquake of 30 October 2016 completely devastated the structure of the basilica, leaving only the front facade and altar standing.